5-19-1862

Letter from John W.A. Gillespie to Editor

John W.A. Gillespie
Letter from the 71st Regiment.

U.S. Army

[Text continues on the page, discussing military actions, orders, and possibly updates on the war situation.]
May 19, 1862

We are happy to be able to present our readers to-day with a letter from our regular army correspondent whom report had pronounced dead ______ ten days ago. The letter from J.W.A.G. will be read with interest.¹

Letter from the 78th Regiment

CAMP NEAR MONTEREY, TENN.
Monday, May 19, 1882.

EDITOR COURIER: Yesterday, the 78th with the _____ and _____ Regiments O.V.I. made another move toward the Corinthians, and we are now encamped in an open cotton field five miles from our last camp, one mile south of Monterey, and about seven miles from the extreme front of our lines. The 20th Regiment was sent back to Pittsburgh Landing several days ago for guard purposes, and will not, in all probability, be with the Brigade again for some time. The other Brigades of General Wallace’s division will be up-today or tomorrow.

During our march yesterday, the sun shone quite warm, and the road was very dusty, but the boys of our Regiment marched along cheerfully, singing, laughing, and talking, as tho’ they were going to a wood chopping, with a prospect of something nice to eat when night should come.

Night came (as nights will do) and we found ourselves brought to a halt. Then came the command, “Front! right dress! fix bayonets! stack arms! unsling knapsacks!” Each command was very cheerfully obeyed, and soon after bright fires were blazing along our entire line. In an half an hour from the time we reached the field, our supplies of coffee and crackers were dispatched and in less time than it takes me to write it, the men had thrown themselves upon the ground to seek rest and repose in the arms of Morpheus.

This morning early, our wagons were unloaded, and tents pitched, and now we are ready for everything that may “turn up.” Every movement of the grand army of the Tennessee, indicates that a terrible battle is near at hand. How near, I will not say, for the very good reason that I do not know.

Severe skirmishing has been going on, between our advance guards and the enemy’s pickets for several days. A number of Federal officers have been killed and wounded – The loss of the enemy has been greater than ours.

On Friday morning last, Col. Leggett rode out to General Grant’s Head Quarters, for the purpose of ascertaining something in regard to the rebel lines and works. Ge. Grant requested the Col. to take command of three or four hundred cavalry and infantry and to go out on the lines, for the purpose of learning the position of some rebel cavalry and if possible to drive them back.

After marching his commands by columns (sic) up a deep ravine, he ordered a left flank movement, and, very much to the surprise of the rebels, made his appearance on a hill, a few hundred yards to their right, and ordered his men to fire. They did so, but with what effect the Col. did not learn. The rebels fired two volleys and fled in dismay, and soon disappeared behind their outer works.

¹ Daily Zanesville Courier, May 30, 1862, p. 2
Col. Leggett’s horse, had a bunch of his mane cut off by a rifle ball, at the first fire. The Col. dismounted immediately and sent him to the rear, then mounted a cavalry horse and had rode just a short distance forward, when the horse received a ball through his left fore leg and immediately making a desperate plunge forward heavily to the ground, at the same time throwing the Col. with violence to the earth. By this time the rebels had disappeared, and our little party, having accomplished all that it expected to do, returned to the General’s Head Quarters, with one man severely wounded and with the loss of four horses. Col. Leggett was considerably bruised by his fall, but us now all right, and ready, when occasion requires it, to lead his gallant band into action.

I must stop writing for the present. Charlie Roper’s bugle is calling the companies into line. And here comes an order. “Two days’ rations in haversacks and 400 rounds of cartridges to each man.” Something is “turning up.” Just now (2 o’clock P.M.) the big guns are booming out toward Corinth. *I expect that some person has raised a row out there and is looking for come friend or friends to bring about an amicable adjustment of affairs. If so, we are on hand, “like a cut finger, and will add our mite (sic) toward quelling the disturbance."

4 o’clock, P.M. After standing in line two hours, expecting orders to move forward, we were ordered to stack arms in line and go to our quarters to await further orders. The roar of artillery has been heard all evening along our lines in front, and I should not be at all surprised to hear *some one getting hurt* – i.e. if they don’t quit shooting at each other.

May 21st. I am just off 24 hours picket duty, and find the brigade still waiting for orders. In the direction of Corinth, heavy firing was kept up all day yesterday. Madam Rumor says that the rebels in large force attacked our troops, and were driven back with terrible slaughter. We took several hundred prisoners, and a number of guns. Our loss was not very heavy. I have learned no particulars in regard to our casualties, except that the 8th Missouri lost 8 or 10 men killed and 30 or 40 wounded. The Regiment fought like tigers and drove three times their number from the field.

It is thought by those who profess to know that the engagement will become general along our lines, within a very short period of time. When it commences, the shock of battle (in my humble opinion) will be the most terrible the world has ever witnessed. – I may be disappointed in thinking as I do, and assure you that I earnestly hope and pray, that the final result will prove contrary to my expectations. But this cannot be, unless the rebel army evacuates Corinth, and such a course pursued by Beauregard would have such a demoralizing effect upon the troops, that it would be almost impossible for him to rally them to a sticking point, at any other place within a hundred miles of their present strong position. Such is my belief, gathered from the “signs of the times,” and from the opinions of others; and now leaving the future to wind up the whole affair, and trusting to a higher Power than that of man for the success of our cause, I shall come down to simple facts, relative to our own regiment.

We had a great deal of sickness among our number, and many have laid down their lives, a sacrifice for their country. (The particulars o of each man’s death have been sent by the officers of the different companies, to the friends at home.) Many others have been sent away on hospital and sanitary visits to Cincinnati and other cities North, where they can receive proper care and attention. Dr. Shipley, of Nashport, Ohio, has been with us a little over two weeks. In this short space of time, he has labored constantly with our sick. His entire attention has been given to the wants of our suffering companions, and all his efforts have been attended with most satisfactory and beneficial results. – Since he came, he has sent *one hundred and five* of our number on sanitary visits to Ohio. On the 20th inst., the steamer ________ started for
Cincinnati, with 56 (?) of our sick on board. Dr. Shipley has justly won the esteem of the Regiment, and all will be sorry when he leaves us. When he does go, the blessings of all will follow him. In this connection, I will not forget to mention that Dr. Todd of New Lisbon, Ohio, for some time. He assisted Dr. Reaves, a great deal but owing to a want of medicine and hospital stores, his efforts were not crowned with the success that they would have been under more favorable circumstances. Dr. W. Morrow Beach, of Lafayette, Madison County, Ohio has received the appointment of assistant Surgeon of our Regiment, and is now with us. Dr. Beach is a young physician of fine appearance and good address and has commenced business like one understands what he is doing. On Saturday morning, the 17th inst. Andrew Francis of Company B died in the hospital of Camp Fever, and was buried the same evening. He had only been confined to his cost a week, but sank rapidly from the first of his sickness, until death claimed him, and carried him to the spirits world. Any was a good, kind hearted christian youth, and his spirit has gone to that happy land where the clangor and tumult of war is not heard.

On the 19th inst. Samuel Lewis (of Putnam, Ohio), a member of Company B died very suddenly, at our old Camp near Pittsburgh Landing. Daddy Lewis (as the boys familiarly called him) was a very good man, and always tried to do his duty well, but the hardships of the campaign broke him down and now he, too, is numbered with the patriot dead. His family is their bereavement should not be allowed to suffer. “A hint to the wise is sufficient.”

Thursday, May the 23rd. Yesterday morning the 3rd brigade pulled up stakes, marching five miles, and now occupies a position on the extreme right of our lines. We are encamped in the woods, and are pleasantly situated. If we had good water to use for drinking and cooking purposes, we would be well satisfied, but the water here is miserable stuff, and hard to get in the bargain.

We commenced fortifying this morning and will continue to do so while we stay at this place. Skirmishing is still going on, but it seems to be the impression now that the general engagement will be delayed for several days yet.

This letter is already entirely too lengthy, so I shall bring this to a close, by saying to my friends at home, that I am well and hearty.

Yours, &c

JOHN W. A. GILLESPIE